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TOWARD A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF THE INDIAN AMERICAN.

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THIS DOCUMENT STATES THAT BETWEEN 1952 AND 1961 APPROXIMATELY 50,000 RESERVATION INDIANS WERE ASSISTED BY THE BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS TO RELOCATE IN MANY OF THE LARGER METROPOLITAN AREAS OF THE UNITED STATES. THEIR SUCCESS IN CITY LIFE HAS BEEN LARGELY DEPENDENT UPON SATISFACTORY ADJUSTMENT TO THE LOCAL URBAN COMMUNITY LIFE SO FOREIGN TO THEM. THE AUTHOR POINTS OUT THAT BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF THE INDIAN AMERICAN IS NEEDED TO ASSIST THESE PEOPLE IN MAKING THE ADJUSTMENT. HE DISCUSSES THE INDIAN CONTRIBUTIONS TO AMERICAN LIFE, THEIR PRESENT NEEDS, THEIR CULTURAL, BEHAVIORAL, AND LANGUAGE PATTERNS, AND THEIR MAJOR CULTURAL CONCEPTS IN COMPARISON WITH WESTERN CULTURE. THE AUTHOR CONCLUDES THAT ORGANIZED GOVERNMENT CAN HELP INDIAN PEOPLE RELOCATE, BUT THE KEY FACTOR IN THE FINAL PROCESS OF SUCCESSFUL ADJUSTMENT AND FULL PARTICIPATION IN THE LIFE OF THE COMMUNITY IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY. THESE MEMBERS NEED TO HAVE A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF THE PROBLEMS OF THE INDIAN AMERICAN. THIS PAPER IS AN EXTENSION OF REMARKS GIVEN AT THE NAIRO CONFERENCE (SAN FRANCISCO, NOVEMBER 9, 1961). (RB)

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TOWARD A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF THE INDIAN AMERICAN*

By Wayne T. Pratt

Since 1952 approximately 50,000 reservation Indian people have been assisted by the Bureau of Indian Affairs to relocate in the metropolitan areas of San Francisco, Oakland, San Jose, Los Angeles, St. Louis, Chicago, Denver, Cleveland, Cincinnati, and Dallas. Many thousands of others on their own have relocated in other large towns and urban centers without government assistance. As a result of this large-scale movement to cities, many group relations officials are coming into contact with Indian people in urban centers for the first time. Their success in city life is largely dependent upon satisfactory adjustment to the local urban community life so foreign to them.

INDIAN CONTRIBUTIONS TO AMERICAN LIFE

Indians have made a tremendous contribution to our way of life. Yet the average person of this country has very little knowledge of those contributions; hence no deep appreciation of them. Many products that we take for granted in everyday life have come to us through Indian origin. Corn, beans and squash, the staples of "Indian diet" head the list. The "Irish potato" might be called the "Indian potato" for the Indians of the Andes developed it from a little, wild plant. So were the sweet potatoes, which Columbus found growing in the islands off our shores in 1492. Tomatoes were once thought to be poisonous by white men and the first settlers called them "love apples." But the Indians had been getting their vitamins from them for centuries without realizing it. Chocolate, vanilla, maple sugar and syrup, tobacco and pipes, cashew nuts, peanuts and pineapples were borrowed from the American Indians. They used chili peppers for unnumbered years. In fact, some South American tribes were known to have burned them to drive off their enemies. It might be said that "gas attacks" had an Indian origin.

The products mentioned were domesticated by Indian people through countless generations. By way of comparison, one researcher has pointed out that, despite the wonders of modern agriculture, it has succeeded in domesticating only one plant in our lifetime. That is Quayle, the rubber plant, and that was done under the stress and needs of the great World War II.

* Extension of remarks given at the NAIRO Conference in San Francisco, November 9, 1961

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We have given our rivers, towns, cities, and states Indian names. Our early pioneer forebears copied the kinds of Indian homes they saw. They learned from the existing agricultural practices of the Indians. It was Indian people who first showed our forefathers how to do certain types of irrigation farming.

Many of the words of the Indian languages have been incorporated into our English language--papoose, hammock, squaw, etc. We have borrowed many concepts and ideas from the Indian people. Our language has been beautified by them. For example, we always had used the two words great and spirit. But by putting them together, as some Indians did, we have a new and a fuller concept of the Divine Being.

We have already borrowed a great deal of "know-how" from Indian people, yet there is so much more that we might learn from them if we only took time to look deeply into how Indian societies really function. Particularly helpful to us might be a refresher look at local governments, in which almost all adults take active part. In the traditional Indian groups, change is predicted on evidence that approaches unanimity rather than like the Western cultural concept and practice of the "rule of the majority". Their way, of course, is more time consuming and takes greater patience and effort to achieve the wide understanding that leads to unanimity of action. However, it results in greater stability of the local group.

Indian ceremonials have enriched and continue to enrich the American scene. Many of the truly colorful ceremonies still being practiced as a part of the Indian way of life may be seen in various sections of our country. In reservation areas of the Southwest particularly, some of the ceremonies are being given today very much as they were in pre-Columbian times.

INDIAN NEEDS TODAY

The 1950 census revealed that Indian people by and large were educated just about half as well as the average person in this country. For the largest Indian tribe, the Navajo, representing one-fifth of all Indian people, the census showed that adults over 25 years of age had had approximately one year of schooling as compared to approximately 10 years of schooling for adults over 25 years of age in the general population. In the fall of 1960, two percent of the general population were enrolled in colleges or universities; while only one-half of one percent of the American Indians were enrolled in schools of higher learning.

Health needs among Indians are very acute. Despite rapid gains in health services to Indians, the severity of health problems is described by Dr. Howard A. Rusk, medical editor of the New York Times. (Congressional Record, January 23, 1962):

> Even with the advances of the last six years, the average age at death is 41 for an Indian and 40 for an Alaskan native as compared to 62 for other Americans. The tuberculosis rate is still four and one-half times greater among Indians and nearly nine times greater among Alaskan natives than the rest of the population.
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> The infant mortality rate among this group has declined 40 percent since 1954 but is still three times greater than that of the total population of the United States....
>
> Despite the high prevalence of influenza, pneumonia, tuberculosis, and gastroenteritis, accident is the leading cause of death. The rate of deaths due to accidents is three times higher among our American Indians and four times higher among our Alaskan natives than in our total population.
>
> The second largest killer is heart disease....
>
> Their health problems are severe. Language differences combined with limited understanding of health and disease concepts still constitute serious obstacles to health improvement. The low economic level of these groups plus their geographic and cultural isolation on 250 Federal Indian reservations and in hundreds of native villages in Alaska are also great handicaps in the provision of services....

Even though Indian people still have seemingly large land holdings, local resources have not kept pace with the increasing population. Indians still own and occupy a land area of over 82,000 square miles or about twice the land area of the State of Tennessee. In New Mexico and Arizona they own (The federal government holds in trust for them) over 43,000 square miles or a larger area than the State of Tennessee. Because of geographic isolation, lack of training, inadequate skills and other factors, Indians usually are unable to make the most of the resources they have. Their economic needs are out of proportion to those of the general population as measured by income data. While social welfare needs are not correlated entirely with low income, overall needs are greater than those in the general population.

It is not intended to give the impression that all of the Indian people of this country are educationally and socially handicapped. Indian people are represented at both ends of a scale. Some Indian people are highly skilled and have taken foremost places on the American scene. Neither is it intended to leave the slightest impression that little or nothing is being done to help Indian people overcome their handicaps. The entire effort of the federal service programs, state, church and private effort programs, are aimed to help Indian people to better their conditions. The interest and progress made in education in recent years is very encouraging. Notwithstanding, reservation Indians as a group are seriously disadvantaged in comparison with the general population.

TRIBAL CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Indian people differ from us (when they differ, and most reservation Indians do) because their values are different. The way they do things differ. Indian people differ from each other.

If one were a Hopi Indian of Northern Arizona, he would walk into another home for a visit without knocking at the door. But, he would ask permission to leave. We reverse this order.

If one were Hopi, he would demonstrate his affection for his children and grandchildren to a greater degree than we normally do. If one were Apache, he would not demonstrate his affection for his children as much as we normally do. In our society groups of people do not all tend to do things the same way. Among a single tribal group there was much greater uniformity in action.

In the Hopi Tribe, a man and wife can do most things together. He can help her around the house, and she can help him in the fields. In the Apache Tribe, there are very strict folkways governing the role of the male and female. As the woman was the dirt farmer it has made a great difference in what kinds of "programs" offered them would have appeal and be of value to these people.

These things may seem strange, but not if we look at ourselves in comparison. Are we willing to put the cultural stamp of approval on beauty parlor operation for boys? Not fully, because it is still thought to be a woman's work despite the very rapid changes that characterize our western cultural values.

VALUES AND BEHAVIOR PATTERNS

Seemingly the Hopi had no strong leaders. We never read of a "Hopi Chief." Yet, they had, and have today, all kinds of "mong-wis" or leaders. On the other hand, the history of the Apache can be traced through the chiefs or leaders like Geronimo, Cochise, Mangus Colorado, Alchesay, etc.

Probably no other aspect of Indian life is more important to any agency that works with Indian people than to know how the local people govern themselves and how their social system is organized and functions. It is a face-to-face government in which all, or nearly all take part. It is difficult for them to understand representative government as we practice it in a larger democratic setting.

If an Eskimo or an Alaskan Indian had only one spear and a polar bear was encountered, the opportunity for more than the one single effort is remote. In other words, would not the person be absolutely sure at what he was aiming? He must be conscious of the form of the animal. He could not afford to miss. In this kind of life situation, form means everything, and it is reflected in the art of the Eskimo. The particular form of the animal is carved as the Eskimo has seen it or faced it in life situations.

On the other hand, let us consider a Hopi. In the distant past, his race had to fight drought, predatory beasts, pests, and marauding Indian tribes. His way of fighting had been partly by strategic movement, living first on a desert where he was when Columbus discovered America, but for greater safety he had moved his home to the top of a mesa. In that kind of situation the mysteries of life are apt to be puzzling and complex, and so are reflected in the entire value system (ethics, religion, etc.) of the tribe. A person with this background experience and belief seems to reflect them naturally in the arts and crafts. Hopi society is highly symbolical and mystical. The Hopi Kachina dolls are a visual expression of the effect racial experience has had on their lives. This is a part of the total accommodation process to their environment.

Similarly, the arts of the Plains Indians reflect their nomadic life and the temporary homes, where the people found food and water. Their arts and crafts show this spirit of action and movement.

LANGUAGE REFLECTS CULTURE

English is foreign and a most difficult language for most reservation Indians. Their experience background was so different; hence language developed so differently. Most Indian languages have no word for the biological mother as distinguished from all the other "mothers" in the extended family. Seemingly simple concepts in English and other Western cultural languages have no exact equivalment in Indian tongues. There is no word for locomotion "go" in the Southwest Indian tongues. If one says "where are you going?" in Apache, it is done by expression sounding like "Ha yun din yah," meaning literally the location relationship between you and me in terms of a time sequence. The Pimas say "bahpt'he," meaning "whence you" omitting the "go" concept.

This was difficult for this writer to fully comprehend until he was in New York City and asked how far it was to a certain cathedral. He was told that it was "twenty minutes." They gave distance in terms of subway time. This is the way languages develop meaning in context with experience.

The Pimas have no word for thank you. They have no concept of being grateful as we think of it. In their culture every person does the things he is supposed to do--no more, no less. If he does this, there is no need to be grateful. On the other hand the Hopi Indians have many words or expressions for thank you. Through their long experience of living close together in pueblos they found need for many ways to express inter-personal relationships. The "final" words of "esquali" (female) and "kwa-kwa" (male) mean not only thank you, but I will do the same for you. Through the use of these words they express their value of compulsive reciprocity when a favor is done for them.

Reservation Indian people are handicapped by their inability to use the English language for effective communication.

BROAD CULTURAL CONCEPTS AND DIFFERENCES

These differences need to be equated and understood for effective and wider participation on the part of Indian people in American life. Some of the cultural differences may best be described by broad cultural concepts. Incidentally, these concepts, though oversimplified in this context, align Indian values with the majority of cultures of the world, which, in contrast, relates Western cultures to the minority. Some of the concepts which describe cultural differences are:

1. Cooperation versus competition.

Indian societies are cooperative. We are highly competitive. The writer at different times has asked many Pima children how much cotton they had picked. The answer given was, "I don't know." They probably did not know for they put their cotton as they picked it in the sack with that of the other members of the family group. If they did know they would not want to brag. Ask any non-Indian child how much cotton he had picked. He would know and he would tell you. Indians need to learn to be competitive, not because competition is morally right or better, but because it is a way of life in the dominant society in which they live and where they need to find better ways to adjust to it.

2. Shame versus guilt.

Our culture is guilt-ridden (too much so in the thinking of a prominant Jesuit psychiatrist). We can feel guilty over the most trivial things. Indian people do not normally have this deep sense of guilt. Theirs is a shame society. It is a word they readily adopt and understand. If one were near an Indian mother he might hear her say to her children, "Shame on you!" for this or that, meaning that the child has done something not approved by the local group. This is in contrast to our concepts of sin and guilt.

3. Kinship versus roles and status.

We have a status society. We base our attitudes toward a person on what he does--his role in life. It is not so with unacculturated Indians. If they meet a member of their tribe, they find out first what their kinship ties are. This determines their attitude toward the person.

4. Local government versus big democratic government.

In our background heritage, we have the Magna Carta, the Bill of Rights, and the Constitution. These are focal points for the long struggle for individual freedoms and rights. Indians do not have this kind of background or concept of individual rights. This was no problem in local, local government. Hence Indians may have but little understanding of citizenship rights. They are not likely to show much interest in anti-segregation activities. In fact, they probably will voluntarily segregate in urban centers.

5. Value of Compact living.

Most Indian people live in small or close quarters in comparison

with western cultural practices. Indian people seem to get great security from compact living. Some observers further defined this value by showing that Indians achieve through psychological isolation of the sexes what their western cultural counterparts achieve through physiological isolation of the sexes. In other words we seem to feel that we must put all our boys in one room and our girls in another room, if not in a room for each of them. On the other hand Indian families have found deep value and a way to live in much closer quarters. There may also be some concomitants to compact living in relation to the security of the child in the home that has been overlooked in our value system. On the practical side the value of compact living may partially explain why all the vacant rooms in larger quarters in the urban community may be filled with Indian relatives or members of the extended family unit of the relocated family.

6. Concepts of time, habituation to work by the clock and saving may be particularly difficult for reservation Indians to understand and practice in our Western society.

A deep understanding of Indian values will give clues to problems and difficulties Indian people are likely to encounter in urban life.

ALL CULTURES ARE UTILITARIAN

The values of Indian people, like those of all people, are never static. Indians change, like all people, when they see value in the change.

Some Papago Indians were known to travel 400 miles into Old Mexico to have a priest christen their baby. They did this because it had such great value to them. In their thinking probably the greatest "good" that could happen to a child was to get a name as they believed from the gods. The naming ceremony was one of the most important ceremonies among certain of the Southwestern tribes. The educational process actually began with the naming of the child. The child was constantly reminded of what his name meant. This was a technique in personality development. This ceremony is still retained among the Hopi Indians.

In twenty-five years the pick-up truck has about replaced the wagon on the Navajo Reservation. The TV antenna is another visuable evidence of a utilitarian value in primitive Indian homes in the Southwest.

THE NATURE OF OUR SOCIETY MAY CREATE BARRIERS FOR INDIAN PEOPLE

One social scientist has listed the dimensions or attributes with which members of groups seek to relate themselves to other groups. These attributes may well form a check list by which we can see how difficult it may be for reservation Indians to move in our midst and to become a part of our functioning community. These group attributes are communication ease and action, inter-group service, influence, regulation, esteem, intimacy, and privilege. Think how difficult it must be for a reservation Indian to become a full participant in the group life of the urban community if he does not speak the language of the dominant group.

The excessive use of alcohol is a serious problem among many Indian groups. Most tribes do not have strong mores or taboos against its use. Most Southwestern Indians in pre-Columbian times made a mildly intoxicating drink which was consumed on very special occasions. Some tribes made it from the cacti bloom. It took large quantities to produce mildly intoxicating effects. Its use did not tend to create social problems. Hence there were no taboos developed against its use. When non-Indian people came they brought 80 and 100 proof spirits. Instead of taking days to become slightly intoxicated the effect was produced in a short time. The excessive use of alcohol has contributed greatly to the social disorganization among certain groups.

THE CHALLENGE THAT NEW UNDERSTANDING BRING

Indian people are completely surrounded, both literally and figuratively, by a non-Indian world. No matter how complete and satisfactory was the old way of life, modern American life has made inroads into the life ways of the still distinguishable tribes. With some, the devastating result has been social disorganization. Other tribes are grappling with rapid social change which seems to be inevitable once the economic base for their life ways is broken.

Indian people have been moving into the larger streams of American life since Pocahontas married John Rolfe and moved to England. They are now amongst us in our cities and towns. Many of them need our help. Because of their cultural background they are not likely to seek us. We will need to seek them. We need to bring them into our community organizations and make them a vital part of our community life. We need to mobilize all efforts and all community organizations in this endeavor. They have a contribution to make. We can still learn from them. We might yet follow their example in giving deep security to children in the home, in their positive and "complete belonging" attitudes toward adoptions and from them their examples of local, local government. They need us. They need more of our competitive spirit, our sophistication in urban affairs and our technical know-how.

Perhaps the greatest challenge is to assist Indian people to make the change with the least damage to the inner security of the individual. It begins with deep understanding and acceptance of Indian people "where they are" along the acculturation ladder. We may need to help them to identify the acceptable choices they can make.

In summary, organized government can only help Indian people to a point, to adjust to a new community life. Beyond this point the friends, neighbors, and members of local organizations in the urban community are the key factors in the final process of successful adjustment and full participation in the life of the community.

A long-time observer has found that the Indian college student is "reticent, shy and seldom tells others of his needs, and one day someone asks where he is, and nobody knows. He has quietly left the campus and gone home without saying anything to anyone." Too often this same story is repeated by the Indian family in the urban complex. Surely this presents a challenge to find ways to help Indian people to participate fully in American life.